

Loris Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia: Provocation and hope for a renewed public education

Improving Schools

2016, Vol. 19(2) 167–176

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DOI: 10.1177/1365480216651521

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Abstract

Loris Malaguzzi (1920–1994) was one of the great educationalists of the last century, helping to create a system of public (or municipal) schools in his home city of Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy that is, arguably, the most successful example of radical or progressive education that has ever been. The article gives an introduction to Malaguzzi and his work, starting with a short overview of his career, then outlining some of the most important understandings, values and practices that came to define his pedagogical thinking and work, and counterpointing this with the attention he paid to organisation, which he believed was vital but always subservient to values and practice. Finally, the article considers his significance to education today, expanding on how Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia provide both provocation and hope for a renewed public education. The author draws on a recently published translation and collection of Malaguzzi's writings and speeches, on which he worked as co-editor, 'Loris Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia'.

Keywords

Early childhood education, Loris Malaguzzi, public education, Reggio Emilia

Loris Malaguzzi (1920–1994) was one of the great educationalists of the last century. He helped to create a system of public (or municipal) schools in his home city of Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy that is, arguably, the most successful, most extensive and most sustained example of radical or progressive education that has ever been. A strong claim, but difficult to deny when today there are 47 schools in the city's system (33 managed by the *comune* (city council) itself, and 14 provided by cooperatives under agreements with the *comune*), and when Reggio Emilia has managed to maintain an innovative, dynamic and creative culture of pedagogical work for more than 50 years.

If Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia may not be familiar to many readers, it is because he and they are concerned with the education of children below compulsory school age, from birth to 6 years. In the fragmented and hierarchical world of education, that puts them beyond the knowledge and awareness of most educationalists, who are involved with primary, secondary and higher

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education, and who may well see early childhood education mainly as a form of preparation for what follows, necessary perhaps but not of great interest to education per se. But in the field of early childhood education, Reggio Emilia has attracted global attention and a worldwide following, becoming widely recognised as one of the most important experiences in this sector of education; the city receives a constant stream of study groups from many countries, while its exhibition has been touring the world since 1981.

The contention of this article is that Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia merit attention from all educationalists who seek to resist the current dominant educational discourse with its intense instrumentality, its reductionist denial of diversity and complexity and its fixation on technical practice, not least the deployment of strong managerial accounting and other human technologies to govern children and adults alike. Moreover, as a system of publicly provided schools inscribed with values of democracy, cooperation and solidarity, Reggio Emilia confronts other shibboleths of neoliberal education orthodoxy, not least its belief in the primacy of private provision, competition and consumer choice. Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia are not to be exported and copied; they are (like all education) very much of their time and place. But they show that there are alternatives, not just on paper but in reality.

In what follows, I will offer an introduction to Malaguzzi and his work, to coincide with the publication of a new book that presents for the first time in English a selection of his writings and speeches, covering the period 1945–1993 (Cagliari et al., 2016). I will give a short overview of his career, highlighting the complexity of his role as Director of municipal schools and his avid border crossing. I will then outline some of the most important understandings, values and practices that came to define his pedagogical thinking and work, and counterpoint this with the attention he paid to organisation, which he believed was vital but always subservient to values and practice. Finally, I will consider his significance to education today, expanding on how Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia provide both provocation and hope for a renewed public education.

The life and times of Loris Malaguzzi

Malaguzzi's life, from 1920 to 1994, spanned most of what has been termed 'the short twentieth century'.¹ He was born soon after the end of First World War, and grew up and entered adulthood under fascism and during the Second World War. Following the heady days of liberation, when as he later said 'everything seemed possible' and one was 'inside a sort of great adventure', he lived the remainder of his life first during the rapid economic growth and social change experienced by Italy in its post-war 'golden years', then during the early stages of the rise of neoliberalism to global hegemony. He died shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet regime.

He became an avid border crosser – not only literally but also in terms of his prodigious and wide-ranging reading and his later commitment to inter-disciplinarity:

For me personally the great problem today is ... how to move towards a form of renewal that attempts to interweave the single disciplines and make them interact in a way that has never been done before in learning. We are proposing something in very uncertain terms, which does not envisage abandoning specific disciplines but at the same time does not want to exalt them; something that would like to have the disciplines penetrating each other and reciprocally enriching each other. (Loris Malaguzzi from Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 264)

Yet he lived in one place for most of his life, the city of Reggio Emilia, about 70 km west of Bologna. His early working years were spent as a teacher in state primary and middle schools,

including a formative stint in an isolated mountain village, as well as in adult education for young men whose education had been disrupted by war. He then moved to work in a variety of municipal children's services, starting in a pioneering centre for children with psychological problems and in summer camps, before, in 1963, he was appointed Consultant to Reggio Emilia's first municipal schools, *scuola dell'infanzia*, for children aged 3–6 years. He subsequently became Director of the city's schools, overseeing their expansion including the addition of *asili nido*, or schools for children under 3.

Reggio Emilia was in the forefront of what has been termed a 'municipal school revolution' (Catarsi, 2004, p. 8), in which a number of left-wing administrations in Northern and Central Italy decided in the early 1960s to assume responsibility for the education of their young children, despairing of the state's willingness to do so (a national law permitting state schools for 3- to 6-year-olds was only passed in 1968, the issue having previously been fought long and hard, bringing down an earlier administration) and wanting an alternative to the then dominant position of church schools. Malaguzzi, therefore, was part of a network of fellow educationalists working to create a new secular public education. Although each local experience had its own identity, this network provided a rich source of exchange and mutual support.

Malaguzzi formally retired in 1984, but continued to be active in the city's schools, as well as nationally; he edited *Bambini*, a national magazine for early years educators, and was President of the *Gruppo Nazionale Nidi* (National Nido Group), founded in 1980 with the aim of promoting debate on issues about services for children under 3 years. But he was also increasingly active internationally. The 1970s saw the first overseas visitors come to Reggio Emilia's municipal schools, a trickle that was to turn into a flood. While the 1980s was the decade when Reggio Emilia went out into the world to share its experiences and, in the course of doing so, began building a large international following.

The city's travelling exhibition, first called '*L'occhio se salta il muro*' (If the Eye Leaps over the Wall), later renamed 'The Hundred Languages of Children', was an important part of this reaching out. Drawing on some of the most significant project work from the municipal schools, this was, in Malaguzzi's words, 'an exhibition of the possible' (cited in Vecchi, 2010, p. 27). Shown first in spring 1981 in Reggio Emilia itself, in autumn of the same year it travelled to Sweden, attracting tens of thousands of visitors to Stockholm's *Moderna Museet* and establishing a close relationship between Reggio Emilia and educators in Sweden that has lasted to the present day.

Sweden was only the first stop. The exhibition began travelling throughout Western Europe, while in 1987, a second updated version began a North American tour. Indeed, the exhibition was to be continuously updated and translated into different languages, with work from other schools being added. By 1995, shortly after Malaguzzi's death, the exhibition had been to 44 venues in 11 countries. In a matter of a few years, *The Hundred Languages of Children* brought Reggio Emilia's pedagogical work to the attention of a vast new audience and, together with the many visitors to the city, helped create an international network of people engaged with Reggio Emilia's schools for young children. At the time of his death, Malaguzzi was working on developing his last major project, which was the creation of 'Reggio Children', an organisation set up to foster and organise exchanges between Reggio Emilia and the world beyond its borders.

Before retirement, Malaguzzi headed a growing number of municipal schools in Reggio Emilia. What did his role involve? It was highly complex and multi-faceted, well-illustrated by the documents in the book of his writings and speeches. So, one moment he is the administrator, the head of the emerging early childhood service in Reggio Emilia, writing to the Mayor, other city politicians or officials or to schools – about problems with the construction of a new school, or arguing for the school to have an *atelier* [arts workshop]; or warning against the *comune* assuming responsibility for a sub-standard Church-run school; or proposing measures to school staff to implement

the *comune's* new *Regolamento delle scuole comunali dell'infanzia* (Rulebook for municipal schools); or chiding some schools for failing to ensure representation at meetings. The next moment he is the educator, organising series of lectures or other events for parents and teachers, in which he also often participates as a teacher himself. (For example, in 1965, reference is made to 'Pedagogical November', a 2-week programme of talks on pedagogical issues, open to families and educators, with presentations from leading figures in Italian education, including Malaguzzi who also organised these events in Reggio.) Then, he is the pedagogical director, setting out his ideas about summer camps or schools and their underlying pedagogy, to a variety of audiences, locally, regionally or nationally, but also constantly putting these ideas to work through experimentation, in close cooperation with teachers in the municipal schools. This activity is closely connected with that of pedagogical researcher, for experiment and research are central to his idea of the identity of the school and the work of the teacher. Another time he is the student, learning from innovative work on maths by Piaget and other Swiss psychologists, and always reading to keep abreast of the latest thinking in many fields. While on other occasions, he is a campaigner, arguing the case for more and better services for children and families or for the defence of what has been achieved in the face of threatened cuts – all this within the wider frame of a passionate commitment to the idea of public education.

Should we describe Malaguzzi, then, as an educational leader, a concept much in vogue these days? There are reasons for thinking that the term 'leader' is inappropriate for Malaguzzi. First, because the term never crops up in the new book, at least in relation to Malaguzzi and Reggio Emilia, and he was opposed to hierarchy and believed strongly in the creative power of the group. So 'leader' and 'leadership' are not terms that seem to sit comfortably with the ethos of this pedagogical project or the character of Malaguzzi. Perhaps, although this is pure speculation, the word 'leader' had negative connotations, a reminder of 'Il Duce' ('the leader'), as Mussolini was known, and his 20-year fascist dictatorship. This was an experience that Reggio's schools deliberately set out to contest and to prevent recurring, as Renzo Bonazzi, the mayor of the city during the early years of municipal school expansion, made clear when he told some visitors that

the fascist experience had taught them that people who conformed and obeyed were dangerous, and that in building a new society it was imperative to safeguard and communicate that lesson and nurture a vision of children who can think and act for themselves. (Dahlberg, 2000, p. 177)

Second, because the concepts of 'leader' and 'leadership' – and their corollary of 'follower' and 'being led' – do not sit comfortably in an educational project that, as discussed below, takes democracy and cooperation as fundamental values, and makes them central to its practice. Of course, a leader may try to use the trappings of democracy to secure compliance, making a point of consulting widely and building teams to further his or her purposes and goals. But here, democratic language and methods are instrumentalised and put to work in the interests of power. What is the situation though if you start from a position of democracy and cooperation as fundamentals, as was the case of Reggio Emilia? Where schools themselves have no hierarchy or fixed leadership. Where there is a desire to create a participatory project, based on a recognition that 'individual knowledge is only partial; and that in order to create a project, especially an educational project, everyone's point of view is relevant in dialogue with others' (Cagliari, Barozzi, & Giudici, 2004, p. 29).

Perhaps a different language is needed to describe Malaguzzi's position: or perhaps an old language, such as the Latin term *primus inter pares*, first among equals, a recognition of general equality within which one figure may attain a special standing due to respect and trust gained by acknowledged authority in a particular field.

Pedagogical understandings, values and practices

Space precludes going in detail into the pedagogical ideas and practices identified with Loris Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia (for those wanting to read more deeply into the subject, see Cagliari et al., 2016; Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012; Rinaldi, 2006; Vecchi, 2010). However, some key features should be mentioned, starting with the understandings – constructs or images – that are the foundations for the city’s pedagogy. Most fundamental of all, education is understood, first and foremost, as political, political in the sense that it is always about making choices between conflicting alternatives.

One of the most important choices concerns the image of the child – who do we think the child is? From the answer to that question, Malaguzzi argued, everything else – policy, provision, practice; structure and culture – must necessarily follow. Of course every educational policy and service is based on a particular image, but one that is usually implicit and unacknowledged; national and international policy documents typically neither ask nor answer the question. But Reggio Emilia does, recognising that the choice made about the child’s image has to be explicit and public, and therefore subject to discussion and argument. Malaguzzi insisted that ‘a declaration [about the image of the child] is not only a necessary act of clarity and correctness, it is the necessary premise for any pedagogical theory, and any pedagogical project’ (Loris Malaguzzi, from Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 374).

He was very clear about his image, the image of the ‘rich child’:

there are rich children and poor children. We [in Reggio Emilia] say all children are rich, there are no poor children. All children whatever their culture, whatever their lives are rich, better equipped, more talented, stronger and more intelligent than we can suppose. (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 397)

Rich children are born with a ‘hundred languages’, the term he used to suggest the many and diverse ways children have of expressing themselves and relating to the world – ranging from manifold forms of art, music and dance to maths, sciences and technologies. Indeed, in the 1970s, Malaguzzi wrote a now famous poem about the hundred languages, which also contains a damning indictment of the damage done to them by ‘school and culture’:

Children have a hundred languages: they rob them of ninety nine
 school and culture
 work to separate
 bodies-minds
 making them think without their body
 and act without their head
 making conflict between
 play and work
 reality and fantasy
 science and imagination
 inside and outside. (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 259)

‘Rich’ children are not only complex and holistic beings, but competent and determined from birth to make meaning of the world. They are protagonists, not ‘bottles to be filled ... [but] active in

constructing the self and knowledge through social interactions and inter-dependencies' (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 377); not bearers of needs, but of rights, values and competencies.

This image of the child makes strong demands on the adults who live with them and the institutions they attend. It calls forth an image of the rich teacher, for rich children request 'rich intelligence in others, rich curiosity in others, a very high and advanced capacity for fantasy, imagination, learning and culture in others' (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 397). The teacher should be understood as a co-constructor of knowledge, but also as a researcher, experimenter and 'a new type of intellectual, a producer of knowledge connected with the demands of society' (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 210), working closely with parents and other citizens.

The image of the school similarly complements the image of the child. Malaguzzi paid much attention in the early years of the municipal schools to constructing their identity, how they should be understood. This was particularly pressing because of the negative identity that clung historically to schools for young children – as welfare-orientated services that substituted for mothers and whose staff were primarily to display motherly qualities (the old term of '*scuola materna*' captures this idea). His concept was very different: the *scuola dell'infanzia* that was first and foremost for children and their education, understood as education-in-its-widest sense, education 'no longer the art of teaching; in its broadest sense it becomes assistance with the psychological growth and maturing of human beings, making possible the growth of a rich, original, socially and individually normal personality' (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 41).

But schools were not just places for children and teachers. They were public spaces, without boundaries, open to their neighbourhoods, welcoming parents and other citizens, while reaching out into their surrounding neighbourhoods:

schools that are living centres of open and democratic culture, enriched and informed by social encounters that let them go beyond their ambiguous and false autonomy and centuries-old detachment, and which let them abandon the prejudice of ideological imprinting and authoritarian indoctrination. (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 180)

We are a long way here from the current English view of schools as autonomous businesses, competing for the custom of parent-consumers, distantly related to a central government that provides funding and regulation. For Malaguzzi, schools are a social responsibility but also responsible to the whole society, playing a vital role in sustaining democracy, creating culture and 'offering to participate in building an educating society in which [schools'] contents and purposes can be debated and integrated dialectically' (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 227).

If making choices about understandings was an important part of viewing education as a political practice, the choice of fundamental values was another. Malaguzzi's choice of values included uncertainty and subjectivity, wonder and surprise, solidarity and cooperation and, perhaps most important of all, participation and democracy. As a 'living centre of open and democratic culture', open not only to families but also to its local neighbourhood, the school should be capable of 'living out processes and issues of participation and democracy in its inter-personal relations, in the procedures of its *progettazione* (project) and curriculum design, in the conception and examination of its work plans, and in operations of organisational updating' (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 354). Democracy, for Malaguzzi, was not just a matter of participant social management, important as that was, but also of participatory accountability (discussed further below), and should suffuse all relationships and practices – democracy in a Deweyian sense of 'a mode of associated living'.

These understandings and values, together with his wide and inter-disciplinary reading, led to a distinctive pedagogical practice. Malaguzzi was quite clear about the pedagogy he did *not* want, what he called 'prophetic pedagogy', which

knows everything beforehand, knows everything that will happen, knows everything, does not have one uncertainty, is absolutely imperturbable. It contemplates everything and prophesies everything, sees everything, sees everything to the point that it is capable of giving you recipes for little bits of actions, minute by minute, hour by hour, objective by objective, five minutes by five minutes. This is something so coarse, so cowardly, so humiliating of teachers' ingenuity, a complete humiliation for children's ingenuity and potential. (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 421)

This is pedagogy reduced to a simple equation of predetermined inputs and outputs, obsessed with achieving linear stages of development ('let us take stages and throw them out the window', Malaguzzi suggests) and predefined learning goals. This is a pedagogy of certainty, predictability and intense control, closely wed to what he termed dismissively 'testology', with its 'rush to categorise' and 'which is nothing but a ridiculous simplification of knowledge and a robbing of meaning from individual histories' (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 378). The proposed baseline assessment, that would have reduced 4- and 5-year-olds in England to a single number from 1 to 5, may have been dropped (for the time being at least), but the very notion of such testing was anathema to Malaguzzi, a 'ridiculous simplification' of 'rich children'.

Malaguzzi worked instead on constructing a pedagogy fit for such a child: a pedagogy of relations, listening and liberation. This is a pedagogy of children and adults working together to construct knowledge (and values and identities) – meaning-making through processes of building, sharing, testing and revising theories, always in dialogic relationship with others, working in particular through the medium of open-ended project work. It is a pedagogy that welcomes the unexpected and the unpredicted, that values wonder and surprise. The strength of Reggio Emilia, Malaguzzi believed, came

precisely from this fact that every other week, every other fortnight, every month, something unexpected, something that surprised us or made us marvel, something that disappointed us, something that humiliated us, would burst out in a child or in the children. But this was what gave us our sense of an unfinished world, a world unknown, a world we ought to know better. (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 392)

And this had major implications for all those working with children, for 'to be capable of maintaining this gift of marvelling and wonder is a fundamental quality in a person working with children' (Cagliari et al., 2016). If prophetic pedagogy 'does not have one uncertainty', then pedagogy for the rich child calls for educators able to work with, indeed to relish, uncertainty. Being an educator, Malaguzzi declared, is 'a profession of uncertainty' (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 322), and 'uncertainty can be turned into something positive when we start to test it and see it as a state of ferment, a motor of knowledge' (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 335).

Pedagogical organisation – creating conditions

Malaguzzi was a thinker, researcher and experimenter, but he was also intensely practical. In the earliest document in the new book, a newspaper article from 1945 about the emergence of a post-fascist literature in Italy, we find him asking under what conditions is renewal possible: '[w]e cannot create an artist at will, but it is equally true that the conditions for an artist to be born and to develop can be created from now on' (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 37). He was to continue to ask this question for the rest of his life.

He was a great believer in the key role of democratic local authorities. At a time when local authorities in England have been reduced to passive husks in early childhood education (and much else besides), kept away from providing services that are the preserve of private providers and autonomous state-funded schools, it is striking to see a self-confident and committed local authority

in Reggio Emilia stepping up to the plate to open its own schools. Moreover, this was not an isolated act, but part of a wider civic activism expressed in a range of services and cultural initiatives. In 1961, we find Malaguzzi (himself a great enthusiast for the theatre) writing about how

the *Comune* and cultural organisations of Reggio Emilia ... have presented an almost incredible programme of works in recent years, filled the gap in academic institutions, study centres, journals and magazines, and extended their influence to ever more layers of society. (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 66)

This programme included measures to broaden and increase theatre audiences such as cut-price tickets and good transport provision. When it came to early childhood education, he thought the right policy was for the state to fund, the region to regulate and the local authority to provide.

But his concern with conditions went far beyond delivery of services. For Malaguzzi, strong organisation of services was vital, an organisation both intelligent and at the service of values. Some of the main features of such an organisation are incorporated into the 1972 *Regolamento*, which specifies a raft of conditions to support the development of good pedagogical work. These included the following:

- A support team of *pedagogistas* (workers with a psychology or pedagogy degree, each supporting a small group of schools) and psychologists;
- The provision of *ateliers* and *atelieristas* (art workshops and educators with an arts qualification) in schools, embodying the idea of the hundred languages of childhood and offering ‘a sort of guarantee that our educational experience will remain fresh and imaginative, help the experience not to be trapped in routine and habit, or become over schematic’ (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 223);
- Valuing all environments indoor and outdoor as spaces of learning, including kitchens, bathrooms and gardens;
- Ensuring priority access for children with special rights (the term adopted in Reggio Emilia for children with disabilities);
- Promoting the participation not only of parents but of all citizens in their local schools, including ‘social management’ by regularly elected representatives of these groups plus teachers, a role that should include a wide range of responsibilities, pedagogical as well as administrative, and would take parents from being passive consumers of a service to becoming active protagonists.

Malaguzzi paid particular attention to conditions for the schools’ workforce. He insisted that all workers in schools – teachers and auxiliary staff – should have proper pay and time for professional development and other ‘non-contact’ activities, creating ‘the conditions for re-evaluating and valuing their contributions’ (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 210). Working with values of cooperation and equality, he replaced hierarchy with equality of status:

The auxiliary’s role [in school] was freed so that she can study, meet and discuss on equal terms with teachers, with exactly the same working hours and commitments as her [teacher] ‘colleagues’ ... [t]here are no ‘*dirigenti*’ [managers], there are no ‘educational directors’. (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 223)

Instead, teachers, auxiliary workers, parents, social and political representatives, citizens were all understood as

internal and external protagonists of school processes ... [who] want to participate as equals, and have the conditions that make this possible without privileges of any kind. This is what makes it possible to

construct an experience of socialisation, of cooperative filtering, of educating to a participation in which each person feels they can manage their own changes and bring their individual consciousness together with the group's, which is the vital leap in quality. (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 234)

Malaguzzi reacts in particular against the traditional 'pitiful isolation' of the teacher, working alone in her classroom. Just as he places great emphasis on the group for children, so too he emphasises the importance of teachers working together and creating the conditions for that to happen, with the *Regolamento* specifying two teachers per class group, and regular professional development for all educators (teachers, *atelieristas*, cooks, auxiliaries).

Finally, Malaguzzi addressed the issue of evaluation, through the evolution of a condition that has come to be termed 'pedagogical documentation', a way of working that brings together a number of issues already discussed: the commitment to democracy and wide participation, the hundred languages with their many forms of expression, the value placed on (rigorous) subjectivity and uncertainty. Put simply, pedagogical documentation makes learning processes and educational practices visible by being documented in numerous ways (by means of notes, photographs, videos, recordings, children's artistic or other creations, etc.) so that they can be shared, discussed, reflected upon, interpreted and, if necessary, evaluated – always in relationship with others. It can and does involve everyone – children, teachers, auxiliary staff, families, administrators and other citizens – and gives 'the possibility to discuss and dialogue "everything with everyone" and to base these discussions on real, concrete things' (Hoyuelos, 2004, p. 7). It makes education and the school transparent 'by enabling the active and visible exchange of ideas between a school and its surroundings including the families, community members, and political leaders'; and it transforms a school 'to become a meeting place of co-construction ... (and) a place of democracy (by inviting) multiple ideas, debate, and negotiation among different points of view of an experience' (Turner and Wilson, 2010, p. 10). Instead of current ideas of evaluating education, that offer final statements of fact in an exercise of managerial accounting, pedagogical documentation offers a process of democratic accountability leading to a provisional judgement of value.

Provocation and hope for a renewed public education

Loris Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia may be a relatively small-scale experience in just one sector of education. Yet they are, I believe, an extreme provocation to the dominant discourse in today's education (for all ages), with its narrow and reductionist purview, its technical and managerial veneer, and its obsessions with competition, markets and private providers. For it shows that not only are there radical alternatives, democratic, cooperative and public in character, but suggests such alternatives can be stimulated and fostered: if there is sustained political support (given, in this case, by the *comune* of Reggio Emilia), if a democratic politics of education is revived, if education is open to new thinking and perspectives and if careful and sustained attention is given to identifying and creating the right conditions (just as the present education regime has devoted huge resources and time to creating conditions in which its project can survive).

Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia do not, in my view, offer a blueprint or approach that can be copied and applied elsewhere; like any educational project, it is context specific. Rather, Reggio Emilia's schools can be seen as a local cultural project of educational renewal, open certainly to influences from far and wide yet creating a distinctive pedagogical identity. But the values these schools have adopted and the pedagogical ideas and practices they have evolved can stimulate thought and action by others, and contribute to co-constructive processes of project design and building.

So a provocation certainly, but hope also. The hope that Loris Malaguzzi and the schools of Reggio Emilia offer is for the very real possibility of a renewed public education expressed not via

some attempt to impose national control over school systems, a dystopian society of control, but rather through local cultural projects, networks of local schools, these networks connected to each other and with some aspects in common, but with each assuming its own distinct identity, creating sufficient difference to act as a constant stimulus to new thinking and new ways of working.

Note

1. Originally proposed by Iván Berend (Hungarian Academy of Sciences) but defined by Eric Hobsbawm, the British Marxist historian, 'the short twentieth century' refers to the period between the years 1914 and 1991, from the beginning of the First World War to the fall of the Soviet Union.

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